

**TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS
OF RIGHT-WING POPULIST PARTIES
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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Abstract

This thesis challenges the proclaimed unity of right-wing populist political cooperation on the transnational level in the European Union. Although the thesis identifies four major shared Others against which these political parties successfully mobilize—globalization, the European Union, liberalism and Islam—, the analysis shows that the differences in the regional socio-economic, political and historical backgrounds along the Iron Curtain strongly prevail over the unity within this transnational political movement. The two cases of regional transnational cooperation selected for this comparative case study are the right-wing populist parties cooperating within the structure of the Visegrad Group representing the East, and the parties that met to show transnational unity in Koblenz, Germany in January 2017 representing the West.

Keywords: nationalist transnational, right-wing populism, transnational political contention, political othering, globalization, Euroscepticism, illiberalism, Islamophobia

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Introduction

The rise of right-wing populism in Europe, and throughout the Western World, is becoming an alarming issue targeting the current liberal democratic establishment. The growing success of right-wing populists has extended beyond the national level, since emboldened by the changing electoral climate they have started to form transnational alliances amongst each other and a “nationalist transnational” movement is in the making. Although the term popularly used in the media is the “nationalist international,”¹ the usage of “nationalist transnational” in this thesis seems more appropriate due to the fact that these transnational political practices cut across national borders, instead of political practices conducted between different states. This argument holds especially strongly, since they are presenting themselves as part of a bigger movement rather than isolated national entities. The oxymoron in the term “nationalist transnational” already reveals a great deal about the contradictory nature of this transnational political movement built on the cooperation of right-wing populist parties with a very nationalistic and nativistic agenda. It was exactly this contradiction that served as a primary motivation for examining to what extent they can truly be united, which is the aim of the present thesis.

The nationalist transnational movement and right-wing populist cooperation in Europe grew especially strong with the Brexit referendum and with the US election of Donald Trump in 2016, as most parties have jumped on the anti-liberal right-wing wave of political success abroad. A substantial share of Western European right-wing populist parties met in Koblenz, Germany to show transnational unity just hours after the inauguration of President Trump in

¹ Scott Malcomson, ‘The Nationalist International’, *Huffington Post*, 23 January 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-nationalist-international_us_58862761e4b0111ea60b9885.

January 2017.² Their message to the world and to the voters was clear: “Yesterday a new America, today Koblenz and tomorrow a new Europe.”³ Similarly, the right-wing populist governing parties of the Visegrad Group have also shown unprecedented cohesion in their rebellion against Brussels, working to undermine the current liberal democratic establishment of Europe.⁴ What seems especially intriguing about the nationalist transnational movement is that despite their different (often even opposing) values and policy approaches they advocate on the national level, these strongly domestically oriented parties seem to have united against their shared political “Others”⁵ in order to bring about change on the European level. This anti-elitist antagonism is a natural part of all populist movements, since their politics create a binary opposition between “the elites” and “the people”—discrediting the former as manipulative forces misusing their power and idealizing the latter as the sole source of morality.⁶ These parties have not only been skilfully destabilizing the current liberal democratic political order⁷ in Europe, but they are also gradually entering the transnational site of political engagement shifting the mainstream political norms towards the right.

Although neither populist parties nor right-wing politics are a new phenomenon in Europe, now they seem to have a chance for real impact on European policy making. Since the post-world war era, they have occupied the margins of the political spectrum focusing on nationalism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia and protectionist economic measures,

² Guy Chazan, ‘Europe’s Top Rightwing Politicians Gather in Koblenz’, *Financial Times*, accessed 23 May 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/d712b906-dff2-11e6-8405-9e5580d6e5fb>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ ‘Big, Bad Visegrad’, *The Economist*, accessed 24 May 2017, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21689629-migration-crisis-has-given-unsettling-new-direction-old-alliance-big-bad-visegrad>.

⁵ Iver B. Neumann, ‘Uses of the Other in World Politics’, in *Uses of the Other: ‘The East’ in European Identity Formation* (Manchester University Press, 1999), 1–38.

⁶ Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, ‘What Is Populism?’, in *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.

⁷ Margaret Canovan, ‘Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy’, *Political Studies* 47, no. 1 (1999): 7.

mobilizing against the domestically salient Others that define the variations of right-wing populism—leading to discrepancies that have prevented them from truly unifying. However, what has allowed them to shift the political mainstream to the right and form transnational ties around shared political goals is the fact that they have managed to re-invent themselves with the changing political cleavages,⁸ incorporating both rightist nativist exclusionary practices and leftist economic policies, or even liberal values in the case of the West. This new face of right-wing populism has helped them exploit new political opportunities created by the growing dissatisfaction of people with the establishment in the wake of the mismanaged 2008 economic recession within the Eurozone,⁹ by the recently unfolding refugee crisis with an influx of people coming predominantly from Muslim countries¹⁰ and by the increasing number of terrorist attacks¹¹ in Europe.¹² They offer a seemingly easy, but radical solution: rolling back the centralized power of Brussels, limiting immigration in order to reverse the erosion of nostalgic cultural/national identities and limiting the access of non-nationals to the welfare system in order to maximize benefits for the people that are perceived as the losers of the neo-liberal capitalist regime.¹³

⁸ Hanspeter Kriesi, 'Restructuration of Partisan Politics and the Emergence of a New Cleavage Based on Values', *West European Politics* 33, no. 3 (1 May 2010): 673–85, doi:10.1080/01402381003654726.

⁹ Klaus Armingeon and Kai Guthmann, 'Democracy in Crisis? The Declining Support for National Democracy in European Countries, 2007-2011', *European Journal of Political Research* 53, no. 3 (August 2014): 423–42, doi:10.1111/1475-6765.12046.

¹⁰ 'Refugee Crisis in Europe' (European Commission), accessed 24 May 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/refugee-crisis_en.

¹¹ Jim Brundsen, 'Terror Attacks Spur Upgrade of EU Border Checks', *Financial Times*, accessed 24 May 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/98bd86e8-c767-11e6-9043-7e34c07b46ef>.

¹² Richard Wike, '4 Factors Driving Anti-Establishment Sentiment in Europe', *Pew Research Center*, 6 December 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/06/4-factors-driving-anti-establishment-sentiment-in-europe/>.

¹³ Malcomson, 'The Nationalist International'.

However, despite the efforts of the nationalist transnational movement to act as a coherent unit, discrepancies rooted in their historically nationalist policy focuses hamper their unity against the current political elites, which raises questions about whether we can truly talk about a right-wing populist transnational movement. These differences become the most striking between the West and the East of Europe, having had very distinct historical trajectories on the two sides of the Iron Curtain due to their different political structures, socio-economic conditions and competing formulations of the people that serve as a powerful dividing line in the nationalist transnational.¹⁴ Furthermore, the research has pointed towards several puzzling issues with right-wing populist dynamics, such as the nativist incorporation of liberal values in the Western identity (e.g., the protection of gay rights or feminism), or the projection of anti-elitist mobilization towards the EU and globalization in the case of the governing Visegrad populists that have themselves become the national elites.

Research Question and Thesis Statement

Therefore, arising from the above outlined political trends, this thesis attempts to offer a plausible answer for the following research question: *Is there a united transnational movement of right-wing populist parties in the European Union, and what are the factors that allow for or limit the scope of an effective cooperation between them?* The thesis examines how these parties operate on the transnational level of political engagement, what their motivations are for forming transnational ties and how they frame this cooperation. The research first observes the unity of this transnational movement in a wider EU context and then looks at the East-West division in Europe, comparing the Koblenz-affiliated parties with

¹⁴ Ingrid van Biezen and Helen Wallace, ‘Old and New Oppositions in Contemporary Europe’, *Government and Opposition* 48, no. 3 (July 2013): 289–313, doi:10.1017/gov.2013.11.

those operating within the structures of the Visegrad Group. The thesis argues that *although globalisation, Europeanization, the liberal elites and Islamophobia offer powerful Others creating a transnational political opportunity for right-wing populist parties—discrepancies arising from the nationally and regionally salient political agendas prevent them from forming a truly united transnational movement within the EU*. The research has shown that the transnational political opportunities of right-wing populist parties are curbed by the very nature of this political family operating on domestically relevant issues, posing severe limitations on the unity of the nationalist transnational movement.

Methodology

In order to evaluate the patterns of cooperation within the nationalist transnational movement, the research focuses on two units of analysis that are the previously identified regional clusters of cooperation: the currently governing parties of Visegrad Group and the participants of the right-wing populist party meeting in Koblenz, Germany. It is important to acknowledge the limited number of cases available on the transnational level of analysis arising from the specificity of the research question, which could pose restrictions on the findings.¹⁵ The selection of these two units can be best explained through the formality of ties between the participating political parties: they are formalized enough to gain credibility in the eyes of the people, but at the same time they keep sufficient distance from the organizational structures of the EU (and the European Parliament) that they are mobilizing against. The governing parties of the Visegrad Group exploit this formal regional framework for cooperation, while the Koblenz meeting was a public statement of unity to the electorate. Although the European Parliament (EP) could also serve as a platform to study transnational

¹⁵ A. Klotz, 'Case Selection', in *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*, ed. A. Klotz and D. Prakash (Springer, 2008), 43–58.

party networks, due to the Eurosceptic stances and strong domestic focus of right-wing populist parties, the loose framework of cooperation in the Visegrad Group and the Koblenz meeting make them the best available cases for analysis.

The two cases to be observed represent a “method of agreement” in a comparative case study, which means that the general characteristics of the cases are different, while the results are similar.¹⁶ While they have different historical, ideological, political and economic backgrounds that could be traced back to the historical division between Eastern and Western Europe, the loose formality of ties within the two units of analysis is relatively similar. However, despite the division between the Koblenz and the Visegrad group, they cannot be treated as independent¹⁷ as these right-wing populist parties claim to be the part of a bigger transnational movement, the unity of which is under scrutiny in this research.

The main level of analysis is the systemic level of transnational cooperation between the right-wing populist parties in Europe—supported by domestic level where the participating political parties operate, in order to better understand their ideologies and motivations for cooperation. The Koblenz-affiliated group includes the National Front in France, the Alternative for Germany, the Party for Freedom in The Netherlands and the Northern League in Italy. On the other hand, within the Visegrad Group the governing Fidesz in Hungary, the Law and Justice in Poland, the Smer-SD in Slovakia and the Czech Social Democratic Party are analysed. Furthermore, concerning this case study it is important to note that the changing underlying political cleavages in the left-right division allow for the

¹⁶ Stephen Van Evera, ‘What Are Case Studies?’, in *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Cornell University Press, 2015), 49–88.

¹⁷ Klotz, ‘Case Selection’, 43–58.

labelling of these political parties as right-wing populist, based on the exclusionary formulation¹⁸ of their policies regarding the people.

Following the nature of the research question, the analysis focuses mainly on declarations made at transnational meetings and on public endorsements of each other's political values in order to discover factors that forge unity or create divisions within the nationalist transnational. However, due to the limited availability of shared declarations, the argumentation of the thesis is also supported by political speeches, interviews and manifestos of the national parties embedded in the given case of regional transnational cooperation, as long as these are in line with the political stances of the group as a whole. Arising from the importance of the direct link between populist leaders and the people, the research focuses on how these political actors frame¹⁹ transnational cooperation in the reflection of their Others and their respective underlying Selves. In terms of temporal considerations, the research covers the past decade including the 2008 economic recession, the refugee crisis and the recent terrorist attacks that contributed to the rising electoral success of right-wing populists, with an additional brief historical background.

Structure

The argumentation of this thesis is structured into three chapters: a theoretical discussion, a historical overview and the analysis of the unity of the nationalist transnational movement. The first chapter titled "Theoretical Discussion on Right-Wing Populism and

¹⁸ Cas Mudde, 'Constructing a Conceptual Framework', in *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11–31.

¹⁹ James N. Druckman, 'What's It All about?: Framing in Political Science', in *Perspectives on Framing.*, ed. Gideon Keren, Society for Judgment and Decision Making Series (New York, US: Psychology Press, 2011), 279–301; Steven Vertovec, 'Introduction', in *Transnationalism* (Routledge, 2009), 1–26; Sidney G. Tarrow, 'Framing Contention', in *Power in Movement : Social Movements and Contentious Politics. [Electronic Resource]*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 106–23.

Transnationalism” introduces various different theories and a thorough literature review on populism, right-wing populism, transnationalism and transnational social contention—in order to provide for the necessary theoretical background knowledge needed to follow the argumentation of the analysis. The successive chapter on “The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Europe” provides a brief historical overview of right-wing populist mobilization and their several failed attempts at transnational networking, as well as it outlines the different spaces of transnational political cooperation, placing the Visegrad Group and the Koblenz Group in a wider context. The final and most extensive chapter titled “Limitations on the Unity of the Nationalist Transnational Movement” contains the analysis of the unity and dividing lines of right-wing populist cooperation within the EU—and it is organized into four different sub-chapters corresponding to the four major shared Others identified through the research. The argumentation follows the same structure regarding each Other, first the perceived coherence of the movement is presented and then all factors working against this unity are discussed, pointing to severe discrepancies in most cases.

1. Theoretical Discussion on Right-Wing Populism and Transnationalism

1.1. Populism

Although populism itself is not a new phenomenon, the recent resurgence of right-wing populist parties throughout Europe has brought it into the attention of the public and the academia as well. What is interesting, however, is how differently the laymen and the academia understand populism. In its everyday usage, populism has become a pejorative term used to discredit politicians, a powerful weapon against opponents especially due to the ambiguity of its meaning. It has been thrown around in the media to describe changeable political opinions, mirroring whatever the electorate wants to hear. The Cambridge Dictionary provides a good definition of the popular understanding of populism, as they claim it means “political ideas and activities that are intended to get the support of ordinary people by giving them what they want...”²⁰—a very reductionist interpretation in comparison with the theories developed by some scholars. In the academia opinions on populism also vary and some scholars even consider it a political practice rather than a political ideology.²¹ Therefore, the following sub-chapter offers a discussion on the definitions and types of populism, and on the oppositions it creates within the society.

1.1.1. Populism as a Thin-Centred Ideology and Its Variations

This thesis relies on Mudde’s definition of populism as a “thin-centred ideology” that celebrates the moral superiority of “the people” over the corrupt “elites” that are occupying

²⁰ ‘Populism’, *Cambridge English Dictionary*, accessed 24 May 2017, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/populism>.

²¹ Jan Jagers and Stefaan Walgrave, ‘Populism as Political Communication Style’, *European Journal of Political Research* 46, no. 3 (May 2007): 319, doi:10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00690.x.

the political establishment.²² Populist leaders create a binary opposition between the two groups, and claim to be the sole representatives of the “general will” of the people that forms a homogenous unit in their eyes.²³ While in some cases their criticism is justified and even desirable—very often their inherent need for an enemy to fight against transforms constructive criticism into a constant search for scapegoats and a destructive mobilization of fear within the population. Since it is in the “thin-centred” nature of populist politics to be responsive to the domestically salient issues, the type of populism of a political party is determined by the specific interpretation of the three “core concepts”—the elites, the people and their general will—they decide to adopt.²⁴ Therefore, we can distinguish between left-wing populism that is organized mainly from an economic perspective, and right-wing populism that strongly relies on cultural and national exclusivism.²⁵ Since the nationalist transnational have skilfully managed to re-invent themselves incorporating both traditionally leftist economic policies and the exclusionary formulations of the people characteristic of the radical right—it is especially important to emphasize the delimitation of the political right in cultural terms due to the changing political cleavages (discussed later in more detail).²⁶

Similarly, we can also distinguish between an inclusionary and exclusionary type of populism (broadly corresponding to the right-left divide),²⁷ where the latter not only separates the good people from the evil elites, but creates a triangle of *deserving people* that largely consists of hardworking people disadvantaged by globalisation, of *undeserving people* that encompass different minorities and immigrants, and of the *evil elites*. This exclusionary type

²² Mudde and Kaltwasser, ‘What Is Populism?’, 6–9.

²³ Ibid., 6.

²⁴ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, ‘Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America’, *Government & Opposition* 48, no. 2 (April 2013): 150.

²⁵ Ibid., 147–71.

²⁶ Kriesi, ‘Restructuration of Partisan Politics’, 673–85.

²⁷ Mudde and Kaltwasser, ‘Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism’, 147.

fits the right-wing populism that is present in Europe, as in addition to their struggle against the liberal democratic elites of the current national and European establishments, they are also very selective with who belongs to the *deserving people*. Although there are many differences between the individual right-wing populist parties in the EU, they generally limit the in-group to their co-nationals. Thus, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the inclusionary-exclusionary nature of populism, nationalism becomes a central topic. It could be argued against the exclusionary nature of populism in Europe that although some countries have an ethnic understanding of nationalism where bloodlines are indeed important, others have an (seemingly) inclusive civic understanding of nationalism based on citizenship.²⁸ However, Blokker argues that boundaries still have to be defined between the in-group and the out-group, and this boundary making extensively relies on an ethnic understanding of nationalist belonging.²⁹ Therefore, regardless the official stance of the country on civic or ethnic nationalism, right-wing populism in Europe is very much exclusionary. Furthermore, it is not only alien nationalities that are excluded from the in-group, but also everyone that goes against their perception of the *deserving people* based on a nostalgic idea of a traditional society.

1.1.2. Othering and Political Framing

It is perhaps easier to define right-wing populist parties in the mirror of the many Others they stand against: be it globalisation, the EU, the liberal elites, immigration, Islam, LGBT or other minorities. Hence, political othering is a widely used practice in right-wing populism that helps create scapegoats for these parties to fight against, and constantly

²⁸ Paul Blokker, 'Populist Nationalism, Anti-Europeanism, Postnationalism, and the East-West Distinction', 2005, German Law Journal, no. Special Issue Confronting Memories—Anti-European Europeanism: The Rise of Populism (n.d.): 372–73.

²⁹ Ibid., 374.

recreates and reinforces the “Self / Other” dichotomy between the in-group and the out-group.³⁰ This practice is especially important for this research on the transnational movement of right-wing populist parties, as the existence of shared Others forges a selective in-group identity on a European level that has partially overcome the numerous divisions within the nationalist transnational movement. According to Neumann, the process of political othering is especially important in the field of international relations, as more attention should be paid to the maintenance and creation of “social boundaries” between the people, as opposed to geographical borders.³¹ Through the exclusionary definition of the in-group, right-wing populist parties are reinforcing this practice as they are creating social boundaries within the society. Furthermore, right-wing populist parties are increasingly reintroducing controversial topics to the political debate that had previously occupied a marginalized political niche, shifting the political mainstream towards the right with the resurgence of racism, xenophobia and religious intolerance.

Therefore, deriving from the inherent antagonism of right-wing populist parties and their fight against the Other, this research also focuses on the use of political framing in the analysis. Political framing encompasses the construction or reintroduction of meanings and symbols that can emotionally resonate in the audience, based on the relevant and culturally salient realities available for the mobilizing actors.³² Framing plays an important role in the case of the nationalist transnational movement, especially when it comes to the right-wing populist electoral mobilization. As it has been argued before, the national variations right-wing populist parties were created through framing their political identities in response to the then culturally salient problems. However, with increasing globalisation and the emergence of

³⁰ Neumann, ‘Uses of the Other in World Politics’, 1–38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

³² Tarrow, ‘Framing Contention’, 107.

transnationally shared. Others, right-wing populist parties have gradually reframed their political goals in a way that brought them closer to each other in the opposition of Islam, globalization, the EU and the liberal democratic establishment. This political tool plays especially well into the cards of populist leaders, as they claim to be representing the will of the majority—while they frame the in-group according to their own political agenda. The power of framing should thus not be underestimated, as the reintroduction of previously taboo-topics into politics by the historical predecessors of the current right-wing populist parties has prepared the scene for more radical political views that had been discredited and pushed out to the margins of the political spectrum.

1.2. Populism in Liberal Democracies

The above outlined polarization of the society through political framing and othering is especially dangerous for the current liberal democratic establishment in Europe. These parties have been democratically elected and they operate within the rules of the liberal democratic system, destabilizing it from the inside. They skilfully exploit the political opportunity offered by the so-called “democratic paradox”³³—which is the gap between the “promise and performance” of liberal democratic elites.³⁴ The wider the gap, the greater the distrust of the people in the political establishment and even in liberal democracy itself. Therefore, in some cases populism might appear to be a desirable part of democracies, such as in the Latin American anti-colonial struggles.³⁵ However, the right-wing populist parties of Europe tend to reduce the democratic rule of the people to majority rule and disregard the

³³ Margaret Canovan, ‘Populism for Political Theorists?’, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (October 2004): 245, doi:10.1080/13569311042000263500.

³⁴ Canovan, ‘Trust the People!’, 7.

³⁵ Mudde, ‘Constructing a Conceptual Framework’, 11–31.

need for the checks and balances that are in place to protect the interests of minority groups.³⁶ Their constant need for an Other to fight against leads them to target the independence of the judiciary system, the freedom of speech and even civil societies or educational institutions. Therefore, although it seems inevitable that liberal democratic regimes would invite the existence of populist parties, due to their destructive and authoritarian policies right-wing populists cannot be regarded as their healthy constituent.

An important distinction needs to be made between the perspective of liberal democracy and of populism on the people: while the latter equates it with the majority, liberal democracy includes minority groups and the political opposition as well in its definition.³⁷ Although it is not the aim of this research to discuss the nature of liberal democratic regimes, in order to better understand their relationship to populism the paper relies on the definition of Albertazzi and Mueller, who claim that besides a fair electoral system “a liberal democracy must also guarantee some fundamental civil and political rights.”³⁸ Therefore, populist claims on the legitimacy of majority rule are misguided and their exclusionary delimitation of the people becomes striking from the perspective of the opposition, as their civil and political rights are dependent on the will of the majority. Furthermore, even those who were once the beneficiaries of populist politics from within the in-group can easily become the Other, the moment they cease to agree with the right-wing populist ideologies.³⁹ Therefore, without the protection of the interests of minority groups and the political opposition, a society can become oppressed under the new authoritarian right-wing populist leadership, limiting the

³⁶ Daniele Albertazzi and Sean Mueller, ‘Populism and Liberal Democracy: Populists in Government in Austria, Italy, Poland and Switzerland’, *Government and Opposition* 48, no. 3 (July 2013): 348, doi:10.1017/gov.2013.12.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 346.

³⁹ Ibid., 347.

universality of individual freedoms. The kind of democracy that is desirable in the eyes of the populists is electoral democracy, leaving the “liberal” out of the equation.

1.3.Right-Wing Populism

As it has already been indicated, this thesis relies on a cultural understanding of rightist politics focusing on nativist and exclusionary formulations of the *deserving people*, in order to avoid confusion over the increasing trend within the nationalist transnational to incorporate traditionally leftist economic policies as well. The above outlined shift of right-wing populist parties towards authoritarianism in their struggle against the liberal democratic elites is not surprising either, as it is used for the oppression of the *undeserving people* in the society. Therefore, to better understand these new tendencies within the nationalist transnational that have greatly contributed to their political success, a brief discussion on the current political cleavages are provided before defining what is considered right-wing populism within the scope of this thesis.

An increasing number of scholars argue for a change in the underlying political cleavages, with the relevance of the left-right division declining—or in other words, the left is becoming ever closer affiliated with post-material values and liberalism, while the right is becoming more affiliated with traditional material values and is dissatisfied by the modernisation process.⁴⁰ While these structures do not diminish entirely, the left-wing division is losing its significance in socio-economic terms and partisan cleavages are increasingly becoming organized along cultural values forming a new “libertarian-authoritarian cleavage.”⁴¹ Despite the wide variety of oppositions emerging from the shifting partisan structures in Europe, it is clear that right-wing populist parties are more likely to be

⁴⁰ Biezen and Wallace, ‘Old and New Oppositions’, 298.

⁴¹ Kriesi, ‘Restructuration of Partisan Politics’, 683.

nationalist, protectionist, relying on traditional and material values, promoting closed societies that exclude any alien elements. Therefore, it could be argued that the political division of the left and right is there to stay, but the underlying structures and meanings associated with it are changing, shifting towards the above outlined oppositions.

This observation is especially useful from the viewpoint of this research paper, as it allows for the terminology “right-wing populist party” despite the fact that many political parties analysed would traditionally be regarded leftist from an economic perspective. To demonstrate this point, the French National Front offers an account of changing cleavages. They are very much aligned with radical right ideologies in cultural terms, however, they are increasingly incorporating leftist economic policies and a strong welfare state: designed in a very exclusive manner, reserved for the in-group only.⁴² Similarly, the Slovak governing party, the Smer-SD that would traditionally be perceived as a leftist in economic terms, campaigned in the 2016 parliamentary elections with anti-immigration slogans claiming to protect the country from alien influences.⁴³ This is not to say that economic issues are irrelevant in the rise of the right-wing populist parties, as the mismanagement of the Euro-crisis has greatly contributed to the widening of the expectation-reality gap of the democratic paradox and to the creation of the political opportunity exploited by the right-wing populist parties.⁴⁴ However, this research paper follows the trend of the changing political cleavages, and while we keep using the term “right-wing”—we understand it in cultural terms that invokes pursuing exclusionary politics towards certain social groups and differentiating

⁴² ‘ENF Group – European Parliament’, *ENF*, accessed 24 May 2017, <http://www.enfgroup-ep.eu/>.

⁴³ Benjamin Cunningham, ‘5 Takeaways from Slovakia’s Election’, *Politico*, 3 June 2016, <http://www.politico.eu/article/slovakia-fico-asylum-migrants-elections-nazi-nationalists/>.

⁴⁴ Armingeon and Guthmann, ‘Democracy in Crisis?’, 423–42.

between the *deserving* and the *undeserving people*, although they have managed to appeal to a larger scale of voters through leftist economic policies.

In order to further delimit the meaning of “right-wing populism,” this research relies on Mudde’s definition stating that it is a “combination of three core ideological features: nativism, authoritarianism and populism.”⁴⁵ In this context nativism is understood as a combination of nationalism and xenophobia, rejecting anything that is alien to the traditional native society—while authoritarianism denotes a tendency to be less critical towards the proclaimed moral authority of populist leaders stemming from the will of the people.⁴⁶ Given the variety of stances right-wing populist parties adopt on xenophobia and liberal values, it is important to emphasize the exclusionary formulation of their policies and the reinforced Other hidden behind the “liberal views.” Although the Northern League of Italy has campaigned extensively with feminism claiming to defend women from the oppressive immigrant cultures invading Europe—these rights are not to be extended to immigrant women.⁴⁷ Therefore, it is important to realize that these seemingly liberal policies serve as a tool in boundary making based on a nativist delimitation of the *deserving people*. The right-wing populist parties especially in Western Europe have increasingly started to use the EU’s own liberal language against the recent influx of refugees and against the immigrant communities mostly coming from the Middle-East. This, among others, has enabled the right-wing populist parties to unite against their shared Others Europe-wide, and to start forming their cooperation under the flag of the nationalist transnational movement.

⁴⁵ Mudde, ‘Constructing a Conceptual Framework’, 22.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Michel Huysseune, ‘Masculinity and Secessionism in Italy: An Assessment’, *Nations & Nationalism* 6, no. 4 (October 2000): 591–610.

1.4. Transnational Political Cooperation

1.4.1. Transnationalism

Since the aim of the research paper is to determine whether we can talk about a united transnational movement of the right-wing populist parties of the EU, a definition of transnationalism is essential. Following the logic of the research question, the emphasis is placed on political transnationalism whereby we understand the exchange of political ideologies and the stretching of political practices and connections across national borders.⁴⁸ In the case of the nationalist transnational, it is the right-wing populist ideology that transcends national borders in Europe, forming a transnational political movement through the exchange of political ideas, coordinated action and the establishment of formal ties between themselves. It is important to distinguish transnational political practices from the international realm, as the latter primarily includes interactions between sovereign states, state-actors or state-institutions—while transnationalism transcends national borders, “*extending beyond and even encompassing states.*”⁴⁹ Other scholars also distinguish transnationalism from supra- and multinationalism; with the former meaning an umbrella political entity encompassing sovereign states and the latter meaning a sovereign state encompassing smaller political entities within its borders.⁵⁰ This clarification of terminology is important in order to better understand the framework of analysis of this paper, as well as it sheds light on the choice to label right-wing populist networks in Europe the “nationalist

⁴⁸ Vertovec, ‘Introduction’, 1; Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, ‘From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration’, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 1995; Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald, ‘Transnationalism in Question’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 2004.

⁴⁹ Waldinger and Fitzgerald, ‘Transnationalism in Question’, 1178.

⁵⁰ Rainer Bauböck, ‘Towards a Political Theory of Migrant Transnationalism’, *The International Migration Review*, 2003, 705.

transnational” movement instead of a nationalist international, nationalist supranational or nationalist multinational.

An important factor influencing the increasing number of transnational movements is the rise of globalisation itself,⁵¹ since the interconnectedness of political spaces and the demise of national sovereignty allow for the diffusion of ideas widening the reach of political practices, forming transnational entities beyond the limitations of state borders. Furthermore, transnationalism is facilitated and magnified by modern technology, including novel media platforms and enhanced telecommunications and transportation opportunities.⁵² This plays into the cards of the nationalist transnational as well, since the disproportionate media coverage of their controversial and provocative rhetorics often compensates for their marginal position on the domestic political scene, while they regularly rely on the far-reaching networks of social media platforms for direct communication with their electorate. Even the increased awareness of the electorate about the existence and ideologies of other right-wing populist parties in Europe makes transnational connections between these parties more salient. Therefore, it can be argued that ironically enough, although globalisation represents one of the most important Others of the nationalist transnational movement in Europe, it has also greatly contributed to the creation of transnational ties between right-wing populist parties in the first place.

1.4.2. Transnational Political Contention of Social Movements

In order to better understand the motivation to forge transnational movements of political cooperation it is insightful to look at the dynamics of transnational social movements

⁵¹ Waldinger and Fitzgerald, ‘Transnationalism in Question’; Sidney G. Tarrow, ‘Transnational Contention’, in *Power in Movement : Social Movements and Contentious Politics. [Electronic Resource]*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2011., 2011), 180.

⁵² Vertovec, ‘Introduction’, 2.

as well, since in this regard social movement theory has a lot to offer. Although all political parties rely on social mobilization, social movement theory seems to be especially relevant for the right-wing populist political party family because of their strong links with the people and bottom-up political participation claiming to return the power to the people.

There are five main mechanisms of transnational contention: *domestication* (resolving international issues through pressure on domestic governments), *global framing* (stretching domestic issues to the global/European level), *transnational diffusion* (diffusion of ideas), *externalization* (bringing domestic issues to the global/European level) and *transnational coalition formation* (cooperation in transnational networks).⁵³ Since these mechanisms are extensively exploited by the nationalist transnational movement, the parallel between right-wing populist transnational cooperation and the transnational political contention of social movement theory is worth exploring—especially since Kriesi argues that movements of the radical right “have an increased mobilizing capacity...since the late 1980s.”⁵⁴

Just to provide some examples for how right-wing populist parties use the mechanisms of transnational political contention, it should be noted that the right-wing populist parties of the Visegrad Group were quick to join their forces against the EU migration quota⁵⁵ through domestication—while the whole of the nationalist transnational presented the refugee crisis in terms of alien cultures attacking a European identity,⁵⁶ an example of global framing. Transnational diffusion is also a very strong element of right-wing populist party cooperation,

⁵³ Tarrow, ‘Transnational Contention’, 176–95.

⁵⁴ Hanspeter Kriesi, ‘Movements of the Left, Movements of the Right: Putting the Mobilization of Two New Types of Social Movements into Political Context’, in *Continuity and Change in Contemporary Capitalism*, ed. Herbert Kitschelt (Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics., 1999), 422.

⁵⁵ ‘Big, Bad Visegrad’.

⁵⁶ Jim Brundsen, ‘Orban: EU’s “Christian Identity” under Threat from Muslim Migrants’, *Financial Times*, accessed 24 May 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/7ecde2c2-af12-329a-9133-29a7bee08e31>.

since they are all shouting “our own people first” pointing at all their shared Others to be second.⁵⁷ While it is somewhat tricky to find an example of externalization concerning the anti-elitist nature of the nationalist transnational, the proofs of transnational coalition formation are countless, be it the radical right meeting in Koblenz, Germany, the cooperation within the structures of Visegrad, or the right-wing umbrella political parties within the European Parliament. Therefore, transnational social contention provides a further frame for the discussion on the unity of the movement, as it has been clearly demonstrated that these networks are formed and intentionally used by the right-wing populist parties of the EU.

1.5. Chapter Summary

The rise of the nationalist transnational movement is to a great extent enabled by the re-invention of right-wing populism in the face of changing political cleavages, incorporating traditionally leftist economic measures with the culturally rightist exclusionary features of right-wing populism. Furthermore, populism seems to be an inherent part of liberal democracy, destabilizing it from the inside in its struggle against the elites. At the same time right-wing populist parties (in addition to othering the evil elites) create several new Others to form the out-group of *undeserving people* and attempt to reduce the people to a very nativist delimitation of the *deserving people*—politically framing the boundaries between and the identities of the Other / Self according to their best interest. Therefore, while the right-wing populist parties have indeed many transnationally shared and regionally distinct Others, they also have many shared and distinct identities.

This is where the transnational element becomes essential, as through globalization and Europeanization process, the boundary between the national and the international has become blurred. The interest of the populists in national sovereignty rooted in majority rule is

⁵⁷ Kriesi, ‘Movements of the Left, Movements of the Right’, 406.

in strong contradiction with the governmentalization of sovereignty,⁵⁸ as it means its diffusion towards the supra- and international level. Similarly, right-wing exclusionary and nativist ideologies go against the cosmopolitanism and liberalism of globalization and especially of the EU—thus, the rise of right-wing populism in Europe seems to have been inevitable. The very structure of the EU in combination with the recent events on the transnational political scene (economic recession, refugee crisis, terrorist attacks) have provided countless political opportunities for the nationalist transnational, which has been skilfully exploiting them through the mechanisms of transnational political contention known from social movement theory.

⁵⁸ Jens Bartelson, ‘Restoring Sovereignty?’, in *Sovereignty as Symbolic Form*, Critical Issues in Global Politics: 6 (New York, US: Routledge, 2014), 69.

2. The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Europe

2.1. Historical Overview of Right-Wing Populist Mobilization in Europe

To get a clearer image of the nationalist transnational, the different historical trajectories of right-wing populist parties explain a great deal about the current divisions within the movement. In his discussion on the construction of transnational political movements, Featherstone argues that “through linking the constitution of populist logics with the formation of distinctive maps of grievance” we can better understand the structure and mission of the cooperation forged between the separate parties.⁵⁹ This applies to the nationalist transnational as well, especially since this thesis argues that they have not achieved true unity due to their divergent historical, political and socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, since the radical right was historically on the margins of the political scene, there was very little incentive for them to cooperate. The price they would have had to pay for cooperation (due to the strong nationalist focus that often went against the interests of one another) outweighed the potential gains they could have gained from transnational connections, as being associated with other political outcasts would have generated little political legitimacy.

2.1.1. Right-Wing Populist Mobilization

An important lesson from the history is provided by the manner how these parties came into existence, which defined the basis for their transnational cooperation today—still riddled with discrepancies. In his discussion on the networks of the radical right, Mares outlines six waves of political mobilization when right-wing political parties were created in

⁵⁹ David Featherstone, ‘Geographies of Power and the Counter-Globalization Movement’, in *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 148.

Europe: the first and most important wave was against the political establishment in the 1970-80s (e.g. the National Front in France or the German Republicans); the second was in defence of liberal values predominantly against Muslim immigrants in the late 1990s (e.g. the Dutch List Pim Fortuyn); the third was the struggle of marginalized regions (e.g. the Northern League in Italy or the Flemish Bloc in Belgium); the fourth wave gave rise to “protest-transformational” parties in the East in the process of democratization (e.g. the Slovak National Party); the fifth was brought about by the “westernization” of the East through the transnational diffusion of ideologies and the sixth was a Slavic dominated nationalist wave that attracted both parties from the radical left and the radical right.⁶⁰ These different waves of political mobilization demonstrate especially well both the antagonism of these parties against their perceived Others and the great diversity of political realities that gave rise to their different political agendas—serving as powerful dividing lines in the unity of the nationalist transnational.

2.1.2. The Role of the European Parliament in Right-Wing Populist Cooperation

Although the uniting force of having shared Others is beyond question, the role of the organizational structure of the European Parliament promoting the creation of “transnational party systems” is also important to mention.⁶¹ In his analysis of transnational political cooperation within the EP, Startin identified three main motivations for Euro-party formation: “shared ideological conviction; respectability and legitimization; practical

⁶⁰ Miroslav Mares, ‘Transnational Networks of Extreme Right Parties in East Central Europe’ (20th IPSA World Congress, Institute for Comparative Political Research, 2006), 4–5.

⁶¹ ‘Political Parties and Political Foundations at European Level’ (EP, 2014), 9, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/afco/dv/study_pe509983/study_pe509983_en.pdf.

survival/considerations and financial motivation.”⁶² While the first two motivations can be found in the mechanisms of transnational social movement theory as well, the third one is more specific to the EP especially regarding the provision of funds.⁶³ These practical reasons seem to be disproportionately strong when it comes to the right-wing populist party family, due to their historical ideological divergences and to the strong nationalist focus (posing serious limitations on the legitimacy they might have gained from cooperating with the right-wing populists of other nations). Therefore, we can argue that the European Parliament as an institution itself played an important role in the formation of the nationalist transnational movement—and while due to the EU-antagonism of the nationalist transnational the EP is not the best platform for the analysis of right-wing populist cooperation, it was certainly the place of the first formalized attempts at a nationalist transnational.

However, before discussing the current structures of right-wing populist transnationalism, it is important to mention how this networking started in the European Parliament and spread to other transnational political spheres, despite the countless failed attempts at cooperation. Since the 1980s the radical right managed to create the Group of the European Right that was soon dissolved and re-invented as the Technical Group of the European Right only to be transformed into the non-aligned Technical Group of Independent Members, leading to the creation of the similarly short-lived Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty in 2007.⁶⁴ According to Startin, these parties were riddled by internal disputes and the “sheer institutional force of the EP to act as a *cordon sanitaire*...combined with the strength of European media hostility” managed to marginalize the radical right within the

⁶² Nicholas Startin, ‘Where to for the Radical Right in the European Parliament? The Rise and Fall of Transnational Political Cooperation’, *Perspectives on European Politics & Society* 11, no. 4 (December 2010): 436, doi:10.1080/15705854.2010.524402.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 437.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 429–49.

EP.⁶⁵ Furthermore, in 1997 a right-wing association of political parties called Euronat was established outside the EP, which was meant to coordinate the patriotic agenda Europe-wide under the motto that has a strong resonance even today: “Europe is ours, let’s take it back!”⁶⁶ The French National Front has also organized several right-wing party conferences covering the then non-EU member states of Central and Eastern Europe,⁶⁷ and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia has also attempted to forge a greater pan-Slavic unity, and it organized the World Congress of Patriotic Parties in 2003.⁶⁸ While these attempts at formal cooperation in the EP were short-lived, they managed to spread mobilization efforts to a more successful and less formal level of transnational political cooperation that set the seeds for the nationalist transnational of today.

2.1.3. Growing the Roots of the Nationalist Transnational

The role of the countless failed attempts at forging transnational unity should not be underestimated, as it carved the path to future cooperation and spread networking efforts outside the EP as well. Similarly to the concept of banal nationalism,⁶⁹ when through the everyday repetition of national symbols the national awareness of people is strengthened—we could argue that the repeated attempts at the creation of transnational unity, the articulation of shared goals and the de-radicalization of their political ideology in the eyes of the electorate enabled the creation of the nationalist transnational movement. The very motto of the Euronat nationalists “taking Europe back” has been widely adopted and transformed by right-wing populists across the globe, increasing the power and cultural resonance of such nativist and exclusionary rhetorics. Therefore, the brief history of radical right networking shows that their

⁶⁵ Ibid., 444.

⁶⁶ Mares, ‘Transnational Networks of Extreme Right Parties’, 11.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁹ Michael Billig, ‘Introduction’, in *Banal Nationalism* (SAGE, 1995), 1–12.

persistence has brought its fruits over time to forge a perceived unity of the nationalist transnational, despite the rifts that run deep within the movement.

2.2.Mapping out Current Networks of the Nationalist Transnational

In order to better understand the divisions within the nationalist transnational movement, it is worthwhile looking at the different transnational structures they have created, with different degrees of the formality of relations. Currently, there are two right-wing populist Euro-parties: the Europe of Nations and Freedom Group (ENF)⁷⁰ and the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group (EFDD).⁷¹ There is also a Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom⁷² operating outside the structure of the EP, which despite its close affiliation with the ENF has a different scope of national political members. However, as it has already been mentioned, not all right-wing populist networks are formalized to the same extent, they also cooperate on an ad-hoc basis, or use other institutional structures to coordinate their efforts. For example, the governing right-wing populist parties within the Visegrad Group exploit the structures of this regional cooperation in order to achieve their political goals together. At the same time, four right-wing populist parties of the West have met in Koblenz, Germany to discuss the future of Europe and to display transnational unity in the wake of their national elections at home. While the parties that met in Koblenz are also part of the ENF, those cooperating within the Visegrad Group are divided between the European People's Party⁷³ and the Socialists and Democrats⁷⁴ in the EP. This demonstrates

⁷⁰ 'ENF Group – European Parliament'.

⁷¹ 'EFDD Group - European Parliament', accessed 24 May 2017, <http://www.efddgroup.eu/>.

⁷² 'Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom', accessed 24 May 2017, <http://www.menleuropa.eu/>.

⁷³ 'EPP Group - European Parliament', *EPP - European People's Party*, accessed 24 May 2017, <http://www.epp.eu/>.

⁷⁴ 'S&D Group - European Parliament', *S&D - Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats*, accessed 24 May 2017, <http://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu>.

that although there are some overlaps in the groups and levels of transnational political cooperation, differences prevail.

As it has been indicated in the introduction, this thesis looks at the less formalized level of transnational political cooperation within the Visegrad and the Koblenz Group, since it seems to be the one where the right-wing populists of Europe coordinate the most effectively, while revealing divisions along the Iron Curtain. This choice derives from the ideological nature and the connection of right-wing populists with their electorate, as looser cooperation without institutionalized parties on the supranational European level (which they regard as an elitist technocratic project) seems to be more in line with their political goals and more acceptable for the nativist Eurosceptic people. Therefore, in order to better understand the analysis presenting the limitations on the unity of the European nationalist transnational movement in the third chapter, both regional clusters of transnational cooperation are introduced separately including a brief profile of the cooperation national parties as well.

2.2.1. The Visegrad Group

When the Visegrad Group is mentioned, it is the current governing right-wing populist parties that are in the focus of this paper, not the historical cooperation of the four countries established in 1991. However, in order to better understand the current political positions of these parties, a brief historical overview of the original Visegrad cooperation is insightful. It was intended to overcome their post-Socialist legacy with their economies severely lagging behind the West, and with a fraud and corrupt political system left over from the Communist regime that did not allow for political plurality.⁷⁵ These countries have joined their efforts in adopting the *acquis communautaire* of the EU in order to yet again return to Europe from its

⁷⁵ Milada Anna Vachudova, 'Political Competition and the Reform Trajectories of Post-Communist States', in *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration After Communism* (Oxford, 2005), 12–25.

periphery.⁷⁶ It is important to emphasize that this was not the first time that the East has been detached from Europe, as it has been historically “Orientalized” by the West and its “Europeanness” has been repeatedly questioned.⁷⁷ This led to a perceived “second-class status” of the post-2004 accession countries within the EU, generating further divisions through power imbalances between the East and the West⁷⁸ and ultimately giving rise to competing visions of future Europes and European identities. Therefore, as the following analysis shows, most factors undermining unity within the nationalist transnational movement can be traced back to the divergent historical trajectories of the two regions.

On the other hand, since these right-wing populist parties currently govern the Visegrad countries, they can also exploit the Visegrad platform for their nativist political agenda. Although the V4 had been the success story of post-socialist transition before accession to the EU, they have recently become the centre of the attention again—this time with their illiberal moves and anti-Brussels rebellion attempting to divert the course of future European integration.⁷⁹ Just to mention some examples, the Hungarian Prime Minister and leader of Fidesz, Orbán has even publicly stated that he rejects the current liberal democratic governance in Europe, as it has not proved to work well for Hungary.⁸⁰ On a similar tone, the Prime Minister of Poland and leader of PiS, Szydło has shocked the public with pushing for

⁷⁶ J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Some Europes in Their History’, in *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 55–71.

⁷⁷ Larry Wolff, ‘Imagining Eastern Europe’, in *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 1994), 89–144.

⁷⁸ Milada Anna Vachudova, ‘The Endgame of the Negotiations and the Future of an Enlarged European Union’, in *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration After Communism* (Oxford, 2005), 224–56.

⁷⁹ ‘Big, Bad Visegrad’.

⁸⁰ Viktor Orbán, Speech at Baile Tusanad of 26 July 2014, 29 July 2014, <http://budapestbeacon.com/public-policy/full-text-of-viktor-orbans-speech-at-baile-tusnad-tusnadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/10592>.

legislation that undermines the rule of law and media independence.⁸¹ Although the Czech Social Democratic Party and the Smer-SD of Slovakia has not been the leading rebels within the group, they also jumped on the anti-refugee wave of populist mobilization against the quota system of the EU.⁸² These four right-wing populist parties are not only pushing the limits of the liberal democratic establishment in the EU, but they also publicly support each other in their shift towards illiberalism.

2.2.2. The Koblenz Group

The other regional cluster, the Koblenz Group consisting of four right-wing populist parties is an even less formalized form of transnational political cooperation. They have sent a powerful message to the electorate Europe-wide in January 2017, when the leaders of the National Front in France, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Party for Freedom in The Netherlands and the North League in Italy met in Koblenz, Germany to discuss the future of Europe and to show right-wing populist unity in the wake of their national elections at home, just after the inauguration of the US President Trump.⁸³ However, the recent elections have not brought victory to most of them, although their electoral support has undoubtedly grown. Wilders received a lot of media attention with his anti-Muslim rhetorics and his fight against the Turkish electoral rallies in the Netherlands,⁸⁴ attempting to translate this international

⁸¹ Beata Szydlo, Poland: MEPs debate rule of law, EP - Press Releases, 19 January 2016, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20160114IPR09899/poland-meps-debate-rule-of-law-issues-with-prime-minister-szydlo>.

⁸² 'Big, Bad Visegrad'.

⁸³ Malcomson, 'The Nationalist International'.

⁸⁴ Cynthia Kroet, 'Geert Wilders Calls Protest against Turkish Campaign Rallies', *Politico*, 3 June 2017, <http://www.politico.eu/article/geert-wilders-calls-protest-against-turkish-campaign-rallies-erdogan/>.

incident into political success in vain.⁸⁵ Similarly, Le Pen has also lost with her exclusionary “national priority” agenda in the second round of the French Presidential elections, although she got a considerable share of votes in the first round.⁸⁶ The AfD has enjoyed rising electoral support in the anti-immigration fury in Germany following the refugee crisis, however, the polls do not give much chance to the party for the upcoming elections in September 2017.⁸⁷ In comparison with the other right-wing populist leaders of the Koblenz Group, the Italian Northern League has kept a low-profile except for close connections with Russia, and do not face elections like the other three parties.⁸⁸ Thus, apart from pushing the limits of the political mainstream to the right, these parties have also stood together to gain political credibility.

Furthermore, in order to place the Koblenz Group in a historical context it is important to mention that they represent the Western European region that has been building the European project since its establishment, whose Europeanness has never been questioned and who enjoy a central position within the EU. Therefore, liberal democratic values have had more time to grow their roots in the Western European society, where liberalism has gradually become a marker of national identity. Although it might seem contradictory at first sight, the successive analysis shows that it is exactly the nativist incorporation of “liberalism” in their identity (in addition to the introduction of leftist economic policies) that has helped de-radicalize right-wing populist parties in the eyes of the electorate—since they claim to be

⁸⁵ Cas Mudde, “‘Good’ Populism Beat ‘bad’ in Dutch Election”, *The Guardian*, 19 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/19/dutch-election-rutte-wilders-good-populism-bad->.

⁸⁶ ‘Macron’s Win Puts Pressure on Poland, Hungary to Align with EU’, *EURACTIV*, 15 May 2017, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-europe/news/macrons-win-puts-pressure-on-poland-hungary-to-align-with-eu/>.

⁸⁷ Sebastian Christ, ‘Why Is Germany’s Anti-Immigration AfD Party So Popular?’, *Huffington Post*, 3 May 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sebastian-christ/why-is-germanys-afd-party-so-popular_b_9829578.html.

⁸⁸ Max Seddon and James Politi, ‘Putin’s Party Signs Deal with Italy’s Far-Right Lega Nord’, *Financial Times*, accessed 24 May 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/0d33d22c-0280-11e7-ace0-1ce02ef0def9>.

the defenders of feminism and gay rights, even though these rights do not extend to immigrants, Muslim women or Muslim gays.

2.2.3. Placing Visegrad and Koblenz in the Nationalist Transnational

The portrayal of the regional cooperation within the Visegrad Group and the Koblenz affiliated group of political parties has revealed a considerable unity within these clusters—but the right-wing populist leaders of the West and the East have also shown mutual solidarity with each other across the Iron Curtain. For example, in her presidential campaign Le Pen stated that she would be willing to discuss the future of the EU with Orban and Kaczynski (the unofficial leader of the Polish right-wing populists⁸⁹), even though she does not expect to agree on everything with them.⁹⁰ Similarly, Wilders has emphasized his connections with the Hungarian Fidesz and Orban before the elections in the Netherlands.⁹¹ Although it presents a strong case of Europe-wide unity within the nationalist transnational movement, let us not forget that while the Koblenz affiliated parties are still marginal and seeking political legitimacy, the Visegrad parties already enjoy majority support and are less direct with their public connections to Koblenz.

Therefore, it is important to emphasize that while both groups are embedded in the wider networks of the nationalist transnational movement in the EU and there is a considerable overlap between their ideologies and political goals, the differences between the two clusters prevail and the regionalization of closer cooperation is not coincidental.

⁸⁹ Henry Foy, 'Jaroslaw Kaczynski: Poland's Kingmaker', *Financial Times*, accessed 24 May 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/8238e15a-db46-11e5-a72f-1e7744c66818>.

⁹⁰ Jędrzej Bielecki, 'Francja: Marine Le Pen Zapowiada Sojusz Z Jarosławem Kaczyńskim', accessed 24 May 2017, <http://www.rp.pl/Wybory-we-Francji/303129959-Francja-Marine-Le-Pen-zapowiada-sojusz-z-Jaroslawem-Kaczynskim.html>.

⁹¹ Gyorgy Lazar, 'Geert Wilders Loves Hungary and Had Coffee with Viktor Orbán', *Hungarian Free Press*, accessed 24 May 2017, <http://hungarianfreepress.com/2017/03/12/geert-wilders-loves-hungary-and-had-coffee-with-viktor-orban/>.

3. Limitations on the Unity of the Nationalist Transnational Movement

The successive analysis follows the main arguments presented in this thesis and it challenges claims that there is true unity within the nationalist transnational movement Europe-wide. Therefore, this chapter examines the four most important shared Others of the nationalist transnational that create a political opportunity for closer cooperation—in the face of globalization, the European Union, liberalism and Islam—and how the Self is reframed in the mirror of these shared Others. At the same time, the argumentation of this thesis and the examples provided demonstrate the countless dividing lines that undermine unity regarding each of these shared Others—leading to the conclusion that due to different historical, socio-economic and political backgrounds, as well as due to different regionally salient Others, we cannot consider the nationalist transnational to be a truly united political movement. Each sub-chapter is dedicated to one major shared Other, first presenting the unifying factors and then disproving unity through the several differences that prevail between the two units of analysis: the Visegrad Group and the Koblenz Group. However, before diving into the actual analysis and argumentation, it is important to state that the research seeks to “establish meanings” for the cases concerned and to generate academic discussion, rather than to make wider generalizations concerning right-wing populist transnational networks worldwide.⁹²

3.1. Globalization

The nationalist transnational movement has a very intimate relationship with globalization, since besides creating a powerful Other to fight against, these processes have also encouraged the formation of transnational political structures (as it has been presented in the discussion on transnationalism in the first chapter). The primary motivating factor in the

⁹² Fiona Devine, ‘Qualitative Methods’, in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, ed. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 197–215.

anti-globalization struggle of the right-wing populists is the protection of “modernization losers”⁹³ that are the main electoral basis of the nationalist transnational, constituting the in-group of the *deserving people*. This claim is also supported by the slogan “in the name of the people” of the National Front, and even more so by the fact that “national priority” is cited as one of the pillars of their political goals.⁹⁴ In the effort to promote their interests, national sovereignty needs to be regained in order to reintroduce protectionist and exclusionary measures to balance out their perceived loss.⁹⁵ As the category of modernization losers is extremely difficult to delimit due to the multifaceted nature of globalization, Kriesi argues that it is “the subjective expectation of loss, and not the objective threat to one’s own position” that really influences voting patterns.⁹⁶ This loss can be understood in social status, traditional lifestyle or in economic terms, and although this paper does not argue for the centrality of economic reasons in right-wing populist support, it is certainly regarded as a very important factor contributing to the dissatisfaction of people with the current liberal democratic elites.

3.1.1. Modernization Losers on the Two Sides of the Iron Curtain

While standing up for the interests of the modernization losers and the fight against globalization serve as a uniting factor within the nationalist transnational movement, it has to be acknowledged that there are important differences between the two sides of the Iron Curtain. Since it is the perceived loss that is important, similarly, the perceived inequality in

⁹³ Duane Swank and Hans-Georg Betz, ‘Globalization, the Welfare State and Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe’, *Socio-Economic Review* 1, no. 2 (May 2003): 215–45, doi:<http://ser.oxfordjournals.org/content/by/year>.

⁹⁴ ‘Priorité Nationale’, *FN - Front National*, 3, accessed 24 May 2017, <http://www.frontnational.com/2015/05/equipements-militaires-la-priorite-etrangere-umps-contre-la-priorite-nationale-du-fn/>.

⁹⁵ Swank and Betz, ‘Globalization, the Welfare State and Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe’, 215–45.

⁹⁶ Kriesi, ‘Movements of the Left, Movements of the Right’, 407.

societies leads to greater dissatisfaction.⁹⁷ With the openness of the borders within the EU this perception of inequality between the West and the East has grown as well—furthermore, the mismanagement of the Euro-crisis since 2008 has made this perceived inequality even worse. Although its effects could be felt in the whole of the EU, arising from the different economic strength and welfare structures that could ease its strain, some countries have been hit harder than others.⁹⁸ Therefore, instead of gradually closing the inequality gap between the West and East, the East is still lagging behind with promises of Western life-standards turning sour. The Hungarian Prime Minister and leader of Fidesz, Orban has even emphasized that: “Turning to the West, we see the German-speaking world, an ever-orderly realm of emperors and iron chancellors, turning all to its advantage – even economic crises that shred other nations.”⁹⁹ Thus, it seems evident that more people on the East would perceive themselves as modernization losers, corresponding to the fact that the Eastern right-wing populist parties enjoy majority electoral support, while the Western case study of the Koblenz Group consists of opposition or marginal political parties. Thus, the disproportionately larger share of modernization losers reflected in voting patterns in the East points towards discrepancies within the anti-globalization fight of the nationalist transnational.

3.1.2. Welfare Chauvinism

Another difference in the fight against globalization between the East and the West derives from the growing protectionism of modernisation losers when it comes to the welfare system of the state. The right-wing populists of Europe “are challenging the European welfare

⁹⁷ L. E. Cederman, N. B. Weidmann, and K. S. Gleditsch, ‘Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War’, *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 3 (2011): 478.

⁹⁸ Swank and Betz, ‘Globalization, the Welfare State and Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe’, 215–45.

⁹⁹ Viktor Orban, Speech on the Anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, accessed 24 May 2017, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/viktor-orban-s-speech-on-the-anniversary-of-the-hungarian-revolution-of-1848>.

state tradition by re-defining it as the welfare nation state...’’¹⁰⁰—suggesting the exclusionary interpretation of the *deserving people* that are intended to benefit from it. In the case of the nationalist transnational, it is exactly the delimitation of *undeserving people* concerning welfare access that causes discrepancies. Although the welfare state has not been a hot topic for the right-wing populists of the V4, traditionally they have targeted the Roma communities. In a recent political scandal in 2017, the Slovak Prime Minister and leader of Smer-SD, Fico said that he would not tolerate the exploitation of the welfare system and singled out the Roma.¹⁰¹ At the same time, in order to pose stricter rules on the access to welfare, the West has targeted immigrants both from Eastern Europe and from countries outside the EU. The stances of the French National Front on their “fight against social tourism” serve as a powerful example of the East-West divide, as in 2015 they launched a motion in the European Parliament for the implementation of the “national priority” principle, whereby member states would be allowed to suspend the welfare rights of the economically inactive immigrants from other EU member states.¹⁰² Although the nationalist transnational tries to protect the interests of modernization losers through welfare chauvinism EU-wide, first of all this topic has a much stronger resonance in the West than in the East and second of all, their exclusionary policies are targeted against different social groups. This serves as another proof that discrepancies within their fight against globalization have yet to be overcome.

¹⁰⁰ Johan Nordensvard and Markus Ketola, ‘Nationalist Reframing of the Finnish and Swedish Welfare States’, *Social Policy & Administration* 49, no. 3 (May 2015): 357, doi:10.1111/spol.12095.

¹⁰¹ Veronika Prušová, ‘Nezamestnaných Nútia Odpracovať Si Dávky’, *DennikN*, 6 April 2017, <https://dennikn.sk/727156/nezamestnanych-nutia-odpracovat-si-davky-aby-si-majorita-myslela-ze-nie-su-zadarmo/>.

¹⁰² Steeve Briois, ‘Lutte Contre Le Tourisme Social’, *Front National*, accessed 24 May 2017, <http://www.frontnational.com/2015/05/equipements-militaires-la-priorite-etrangere-umps-contre-la-priorite-nationale-du-fn/>; Bernard Monot, ‘Proposition de Résolution Du Parlement Européen’, *Front National*, accessed 24 May 2017, <http://www.frontnational.com/2015/05/equipements-militaires-la-priorite-etrangere-umps-contre-la-priorite-nationale-du-fn/>.

3.1.3. The Nationalist Transnational Divided in Anti-Globalization

As the previous discussion on the anti-globalization efforts of the nationalist transnational has shown, there are several facets of their struggle where they can form strong alliances to achieve shared political goals more effectively exploiting the power of transnational political contention. However, not even this shared powerful Other has proved to build enough bridges to overcome the divisions along the Iron Curtain. The different socio-economic and political backgrounds of the East and the West serve as a powerful dividing line, together with regionally salient social boundaries that are discussed in more detail under the sub-chapter on Islamophobia. Therefore, we can conclude that the uneven presence of modernization losers and the different approaches taken to welfare chauvinism arising from the delimitations of the *undeserving people* serve as a proof against the unity of the nationalist transnational.

3.2. Euroscepticism

Another shared Other of the nationalist transnational is the EU that unites them in their Euroscepticism, or as it is argued here: Euroscepticisms. Following the discussion on globalization it has to be acknowledged that the dynamics of the two processes are similar, since Europeanization is a regional variant of globalization. Thus, many of the arguments brought forward under these two headings could easily apply for the other as well. However, before analysing the unity of the nationalist transnational movement in this regard, it is important to problematize the concept of Euroscepticism. Some scholars distinguish between “Eurosceptics” and “Eurorejects” broadly corresponding to soft and hard Euroscepticism—with the former aiming to reform the current structure of the EU and the latter rejecting it in

its entirety.¹⁰³ The best example for Euroreject stances would be the British UKIP that campaigned for Brexit,¹⁰⁴ since instead of only criticising the EU they simply rejected British membership. On the other hand, both the Koblenz affiliated parties and the Visegrad Group are rather Eurosceptic, as they prefer reforming the EU to leaving it completely (although in some cases Euroreject stances seem to have been softened only by the preferences of the electorate).¹⁰⁵ Therefore, this suggests that the nationalist transnational and the two regional clusters of cooperation under scrutiny are united to a certain degree in their Euroscepticism.

3.2.1. Competing Versions of Euroscepticism

However, as it has already been indicated, the different socio-economic and political backgrounds in the West and the East that define the Others and the Selves of right-wing populist parties create competing versions of Euroscepticism within the nationalist transnational movement. Since the parties within the Koblenz Group are speaking from a marginal or oppositional position, this allows for stronger antagonist dynamics that is reflected in their Euroscepticism as well. On the other hand, the governing parties of the Visegrad Group have a stronger motivation to tone down their antagonism, as the East is still a net recipient of EU funding.¹⁰⁶ A good example for the Koblenz stances would be the leader of the German AfD, Petry, as she claimed that “if we don’t achieve any radical reforms in five

¹⁰³ Andrea L. P. Pirro and Stijn Van Kessel, ‘United in Opposition? The Populist Radical Right’s EU-Pessimism in Times of Crisis’, 2017, 3, <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/dspace-jspui/handle/2134/23460>.

¹⁰⁴ Nigel Farage, ‘It’s Not Just Difficult to Control Our Borders within the EU, It’s Impossible’, *UKIP*, accessed 25 May 2017, http://www.ukip.org/it_s_not_just_difficult_to_control_our_borders_within_the_eu_it_s_impossible.

¹⁰⁵ Stijn Van Kessel, ‘Geert Wilders Is No Longer so Keen on Pushing for a “Nexit”’, *EUROPP*, 2 March 2017, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2017/03/02/nexit-evolving-euroscepticism-geert-wilders/>.

¹⁰⁶ Stanley Pignal, ‘Winners and Losers of the EU Budget’, *Financial Times*, accessed 25 May 2017, <http://blogs.ft.com/brusselsblog/2011/06/29/winners-and-losers-of-the-eu-budget/>.

years then the [exit] question will be raised also in Germany...”¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Le Pen has stated that the discussion on a “new Europe” is on the Koblenz agenda, as they are all “attached to sovereignty” and they do not support the “the European Union’s *laissez-faire* policies.”¹⁰⁸ Although after the Brexit vote there were calls for a similar referendum in the East as well, their position in the EU as net-beneficiaries did not allow them to take such hard stances. The Prime Minister of Czechia and leader of the Social Democratic Party, Sobotka has quickly countered President Zeman’s suggestion that although Czechia cannot financially afford to leave the EU they still should have a referendum.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, we can see that the nationalist transnational is indeed united in their wish to reform the EU—however, they speak from different positions and have clashing ideas on how to do so, creating significant discrepancies within the unity of the movement.

3.2.2. Competing Visions of Europe

Similarly, from the different competing Euroscepticisms different competing visions of Europes follow. In this regard history matters as well, since while the Europeanness of the West has not been questioned, the East had frequently been orientalized¹¹⁰ and it was historically “detached” from Europe by the Iron Curtain.¹¹¹ This is especially important because of the 2004 enlargement of the EU that brought the accession of several post-

¹⁰⁷ Frauke Petry, quoted in Stefan Wagstyl, ‘German Rightwing Leader Warns EU to Reform or Disintegrate’, *Financial Times*, 27 July 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/7a67dab8-5020-11e6-88c5-db83e98a590a>.

¹⁰⁸ Marine Le Pen, quoted in Nicola Slawson, ‘Marine Le Pen Leads Gathering of EU Far-Right Leaders in Koblenz’, *The Guardian*, 21 January 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/21/marine-le-pen-leads-gathering-of-eu-far-right-leaders-in-koblenz>.

¹⁰⁹ Lucie Bednarova, ‘Sobotka Speaks out against Brexit and Czexit’, *EURACTIV*, 7 March 2016, <http://www.euractiv.com/section/uk-europe/news/sobotka-speaks-out-against-brexit-and-czexit/>.

¹¹⁰ Wolff, ‘Imagining Eastern Europe’, 89–144.

¹¹¹ Pocock, ‘Some Europes in Their History’, 55–71.

communist Central and Eastern European countries, changing the nature of the international order of the EU and undermining the centrality of the West. Therefore, enjoying the luxury of EU membership and emboldened by the growing discontent of the people with the current political establishment, the right-wing populists of the East have started advocating a different Europe, where they cease to have “second-class status.”¹¹² According to Orban, although Western European liberal ideals are appealing on an “intellectual level,” they proved to be unsuitable for the growth of Hungary that is much worse off than its Western neighbours.¹¹³ While the West primarily fights against the supranationalism of the EU and immigrants and it uses liberal values for the exclusion of the Other—these liberal values (discussed in greater detail in the following sub-chapter on Liberalism) do not fit the European identity of the East, which emphasizes Christian tradition instead. Furthermore, the West is comfortable with the power dynamics of the current European geopolitics, but the East plans to become a major player in the future of Europe. Therefore, while the nationalist transnational is united in wanting a reformed Europe, there are grave differences in the kind of a new Europe they desire.

3.2.3. Perceptions of Sovereignty

At the same time, they all seem to agree on an emphasized national sovereignty at the core of their Euroscepticisms—since according to populists, political power should be derived from majority rule and any attempt at shifting power towards the supranational institutions of the EU is deemed illegitimate. As it has already been mentioned, sovereignty in the current European international system is constrained by international agreements, leading to the

¹¹² Vachudova, ‘The Endgame of the Negotiations and the Future of an Enlarged European Union’, 224–56.

¹¹³ Orban, Speech at Baile Tunaad of 26 July 2014.

governmentalization of sovereignty.¹¹⁴ This has been a gradual process in Western Europe, where countries have been giving up parts of their national sovereignty in policy areas where the EU could act more effectively on the supranational level. On the other hand, during the quick transition period of the East the whole *acquis communautaire* was adopted in a short time-span, increasing the perception of the loss of sovereignty. Furthermore, the second-class status of the East and the historical orientalizing dynamics (sometimes even claimed to be modern colonialism¹¹⁵) further fuel Eastern rebellion against Brussels. A recent example from the Visegrad countries is the 2017 Hungarian national consultation and the Fidesz-led campaign to “Stop Brussels” aiming to incite Eurosceptic sentiments in Hungary.¹¹⁶ However, there have also been many other instances when the Visegrad Group has rebelled against the “centralized power” of Brussels: the rejection of the refugee quota system,¹¹⁷ or the protection of LGBT rights in Poland.¹¹⁸ While the right-wing populist parties of the West also fight against Brussels and want to strengthen national sovereignty, these ideas do not resonate with the same strength in the Western electorate. Therefore, even though the question of national sovereignty seems to unite the nationalist transnational, it also creates further dividing lines along the Iron Curtain with an additional internal power struggle turning the East against the orientalizing West.

¹¹⁴ Bartelson, ‘Restoring Sovereignty?’, 96.

¹¹⁵ Valentina Pop, ‘Hungarian PM to EU: “We Won’t Be a Colony”’, accessed 25 May 2017, <https://euobserver.com/political/115613>.

¹¹⁶ Eva S. Balogh, ‘National Consultation, 2017: “Let’s Stop Brussels!”’, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 2 April 2017, <http://hungarianspectrum.org/2017/04/02/national-consultation-2017-lets-stop-brussels/>.

¹¹⁷ ‘Big, Bad Visegrad’.

¹¹⁸ Agnieszka Graff, ‘Looking at Pictures of Gay Men: Political Uses of Homophobia in Contemporary Poland’, *PUBLIC CULTURE* 22, no. 3 (2010): 583–603.

3.2.4. The Nationalist Transnational Divided in Euroscepticism

The discussion on the Euroscepticism within the nationalist transnational movement has shown that not only there are several versions of Euroscepticisms competing, but also there are several visions of a future Europe they are advocating. These derive from their divergent economic and political backgrounds domestically, and from the differences in the historical trajectories of the regions East and West of the Iron Curtain. The marginal position of right-wing populists in the West allows for a more dynamic formulation of Euroscepticism fighting for a future Europe that is exclusionary but liberal at the same time, and while they emphasize national sovereignty, they only rebel against Brussels. On the other hand, for the East it is more difficult to formulate a credible threat to leave the EU as they are net-beneficiaries of funding, they advocate for a future Christian Europe where they occupy a more central position, and in their emphasis on national sovereignty they fight both against Brussels and against the orientalizing West. Therefore, we can conclude that when it comes to Euroscepticism, the several factors causing divisions overweight the uniting force of a shared Other in the EU.

3.3.Liberalism

The third major shared Other connecting the nationalist transnational is liberalism and the liberal elites,¹¹⁹ which derives from the changing political cleavages in society and from the inherent authoritarianism and populist villainization of the elites. This topic is also closely related to Euroscepticism, especially since the liberal democratic establishment of the EU is regarded as a technocratic elite holding power illegitimately. Furthermore, with the changing political cleavages behind the left-right divide it could be argued that there is a new opposition created between the liberal left and the illiberal right, or as Kriesi argues a “value-

¹¹⁹ Albertazzi and Mueller, ‘Populism and Liberal Democracy’, 343–71.

based cleavage” of liberalism versus authoritarianism.¹²⁰ The best example to support this argument is Orban’s speech from 2014, when he declared that Hungary is not a “sum of individuals” but a community, and therefore instead of individual freedoms it is the nation that is the new “central element of state organization” in the “illiberal state” he intends to create.¹²¹ Although none of the other right-wing populist parties included in the analysis have gone as far as Orban in claiming illiberalism to be their goal, they all have been promoting illiberal political stances. Le Pen has also advocated for placing the “national” at the heart of policymaking when she said that “France has a right to its national identity, that is to say to its deepest being, it has the right to perpetuate itself.”¹²² At the same time, while it seems that the nationalist transnational is united in its illiberalism—the successive analysis presents that there are competing versions of illiberalism as well, which further deepen divisions within the unity of the movement.

3.3.1. Fighting the Institutions of the Liberal Elites

Let us consider another perceived aspect of unity within the movement when it comes to their fight against the liberal elites, especially through targeting the freedom of press. As it has already been mentioned before, the nationalist transnational movement has an intimate relationship with globalization and therefore with the spread of media as well. However, right-wing populists are very selective when it comes to the delimitation of “good” and “bad” media. In the age of “post-truth” it is becoming increasingly more difficult for the people to

¹²⁰ Kriesi, ‘Restructuration of Partisan Politics’, 673.

¹²¹ Orban, Speech at Baile Tuanad of 26 July 2014.

¹²² Marine Le Pen, quoted in Harriet Agnew and Anne-Sylvaine Chassany, ‘Le Pen Steps up Anti-Immigration Rhetoric ahead of French Election’, *Financial Times*, accessed 25 May 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/967daaae-2412-11e7-8691-d5f7e0cd0a16>.

navigate between independent journalism and unreliable “fake news”¹²³—which is greatly exploited by the right-wing populist leaders seeking to discredit any critical voices in journalism. This trait is unequivocally present in the East, with the abolishment of a major opposition newspaper by Orban¹²⁴ or with the unlawful limitations on media freedom by Szydło¹²⁵—just to provide some examples that called for public outcry and criticism in the EU. On the other hand, the right-wing populists of the West are not in the position to push through such illiberal moves against the freedom of speech. However, there was a clear attempt to publicly discredit certain media outlets when the populists refused to grant them permission to report on the Koblenz meeting in January 2017.¹²⁶ At the same time, the fight of the nationalist transnational against the “liberal elitist” media cannot be regarded as a uniting factor—since while both the Visegrad and the Koblenz Group try to discredit certain media outlets, they have very different political tools available for action. The differences in their possibilities strongly affect how they formulate these issues, since the East deliberately frames these scandals in subtler terms in order to avoid EU criticism—while the West does not shy away from questioning the truthfulness of the media.

These differences stemming from the position of the right-wing populist parties in the East and in the West are also well reflected in their struggle against the liberal elites through targeting other institutions criticizing their policies. The freedom of press is not the only thing

¹²³ ‘UN News - In “Post Truth” Era’, *UN News Service Section*, 3 May 2017, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56672#.WScdLWWARg1>.

¹²⁴ Erika Asgeirsson, ‘Hungary Newspaper Closure Another Step in Orban’s Illiberal Democracy’, *Human Rights First*, accessed 25 May 2017, <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/blog/hungary-newspaper-closure-another-step-orban-s-illiberal-democracy>.

¹²⁵ ‘Commission Opinion on the Rule of Law in Poland’, *European Commission - Press Release Database*, 1 June 2016, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-2017_en.htm.

¹²⁶ ‘European Populist Parties Block News Media from Conference in Germany’, *Deutsche Welle*, accessed 25 May 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/european-populist-parties-block-news-media-from-conference-in-germany/a-37115183>.

standing in the way of an illiberal and authoritarian society, as the independence of the judiciary, of civil societies, or even of the education system can be easily curbed by right-wing populists in power. To demonstrate this argument, let us consider the scandal over the Polish PiS governing party severely limiting the independence of the Constitutional Court in 2016, when Szydło went as far as defending these illiberal moves in Brussels referring to national sovereignty and to the power inferred on her party through majority electoral support.¹²⁷ Another example could be the recent attack of Orban on the freedom of education in Hungary, by passing a law that could potentially prevent the Central European University from continuing its educational activities within the country, unless the law is revoked.¹²⁸ The West, on the other hand, does not have the power of a governing party to enact such illiberal laws. Therefore, although there is a Europe-wide trend for right-wing populist parties to move away from liberalism towards authoritarianism, due to the differing political situation on the two sides of the Iron Curtain, these arguments also seem to support the divisions within the nationalist transnational.

3.3.2. Liberal Values and European Identity

At the same time, the most important division is created exactly by the defence of “liberal values” by the West, taking advantage of them for social boundary making. While the situation in the East has been gradually changing, in the 2000s the Polish found themselves under fierce criticism for insufficient protection of LGBT rights, with the situation escalating

¹²⁷ Beata Szydło, Poland: MEPs debate rule of law, European Parliament - Press Releases, 19 January 2016, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20160114IPR09899/poland-meps-debate-rule-of-law-issues-with-prime-minister-szydlo>.

¹²⁸ Carol Christ, Jonathan Cole, and Leon Bolstein, ‘Hungary’s Xenophobic Attack on Central European University Is a Threat to Freedom Everywhere’, *The Washington Post*, 4 April 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/04/04/hungarys-xenophobic-attack-on-central-european-university-is-a-threat-to-freedom-everywhere/?utm_term=.173d46a0b3f9.

to the extent that homophobia became a marker of national identity in their fight against the supranational power of Brussels.¹²⁹ Although this was an exceptional case when the conflict intensified to such extents, these liberal values are indeed less rooted in the East, than in the West. On the other hand, the right-wing populists of the Koblenz Group claim to be the defenders of liberal values against alien immigrant societies, since liberalism has become part of the nativist delimitation of the *deserving people*. Taking advantage of liberal values for boundary making can be powerfully demonstrated by the words of Wilders, when he argues that “the more Islamic apostates there are, the less misogyny, the less hatred of gays, the less anti-Semitism, the less oppression, the less terror and violence, and the more freedom there will be.”¹³⁰ Although this thesis has already made it clear that such defence of liberal values is not deemed truly liberal (as it is used as a weapon for exclusion), the stances towards liberalism in this case could hardly be more contradictory in the East and the West, therefore the division within nationalist transnational is obvious and beyond doubt.

3.3.3. The Nationalist Transnational Divided in Illiberalism

The discussion on liberalism has so far shown that while the nationalist transnational seems to be united in its authoritarian fight, there are several important discrepancies between the Visegrad and the Koblenz Group stemming from their political background and tools available. The actions of the right-wing populist parties in the Visegrad Group have shown fascinating power dynamics at play, through shifting the traditional anti-elitist antagonism of right-wing populists towards the supranational level and to the associated liberal elites once these governing parties became the national elites themselves. The authoritarian tendencies of

¹²⁹ Graff, ‘Homophobia in Contemporary Poland’, 584.

¹³⁰ Geert Wilders, ‘Muslims, Free Yourself and Leave Islam!’, *Geert Wilders Weblog*, accessed 25 May 2017, <https://www.geertwilders.nl/index.php/94-english/1996-muslims-free-yourself-and-leave-islam>.

these parties are only amplified when in power, leading to severe limitations on institutions that are meant to oversee the individual social and political rights of the people. The divisions arising from the different political power of the nationalist transnational in the East and in the West also become apparent from their rhetorics, as the East tries to frame these illiberal moves in a way that tones down their significance—while the Western parties are not constrained by international obligations so directly. Furthermore, the most important factor undermining right-wing populist unity in this regard is the defence and incorporation of “liberal values” in the nativism of the Koblenz affiliated parties, as opposed to the Eastern nativism based on Christian tradition with an authoritarian history. Therefore, we can conclude that while the nationalist transnational is certainly illiberal in the whole of the EU, their different versions of illiberalism prevent them from acting as a united movement.

3.4. Islamophobia

The final important shared Other that this thesis analyses is Islam, which has become one of the most universal markers of exclusionary policies, especially when it comes to the othering of immigrants, riding on the anxiety created by the refugee crisis and on the rising fear of jihadism in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Europe. As it has been argued by Hafez, Islamophobia has become the new form of “accepted racism” in Europe, with religious markers used for the delimitation of the *undeserving people*.¹³¹ However, while Islamophobia has emerged as the new hot topic for the nationalist transnational, it is just one type of anti-immigration sentiments that fight against alien social groups within the nation. Therefore, the following discussion argues that while Islamophobia has been successfully bridging the divisions within the nationalist transnational, there are still several factors that stand in the

¹³¹ Farid Hafez, ‘Shifting Borders: Islamophobia as Common Ground for Building Pan-European Right-Wing Unity’, *Patterns of Prejudice* 48, no. 5 (December 2014): 479, doi:10.1080/0031322X.2014.965877.

way of unity, be it the different patterns and direction of immigration in the EU, the divergent socio-economic backgrounds of the East and the West or the various regionally salient alien social groups threatening the purity of the nation.

3.4.1. The Role of the Refugee Crisis

The rise of the global fear of Islam is closely connected to the recent terrorist attacks in Europe,¹³² and to the unfolding of the refugee crisis when an immense number of asylum seekers arrived in Europe from the destabilized, prevailing Muslim countries of the Middle-East.¹³³ This unleashed hysteria within the people that was just further fuelled by the fear-mongering of the right-wing populist leaders across Europe. The nationalist transnational has jumped on this political opportunity throughout the whole of Europe, irrespective of whether or not there were actual asylum seekers or whether there was a considerable Muslim minority present in the country. In Germany, where most asylum seekers found refuge in Europe, the AfD managed to translate the anti-immigration sentiments into electoral support, as they have been campaigning under slogans, such as “Loss of control & Asylum chaos: the AfD is needed more than ever!”¹³⁴ On the other hand, while Germany certainly has accepted an immense number of Muslim refugees, in Slovakia there have hardly been any asylum applications submitted. This, however, has not prevented Fico from campaigning for the Smer-SD in the 2016 parliamentary elections through extensively emphasizing the need to protect the country from Muslim immigrants, and he even said that “the only way to eliminate risks like in Paris and in Germany is to prevent the creation of a compact Muslim community

¹³² Armingeon and Guthmann, ‘Democracy in Crisis?’, 423–42.

¹³³ ‘Refugee Crisis in Europe’.

¹³⁴ ‘AfD-Fraktion Im Landtag Sachsen-Anhalt’ (AfD, 2017 2016), http://www.afdfraktion-lsa.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Blauer_Aufbruch_Sonderausgabe_16-17.pdf.

in Slovakia.”¹³⁵ Therefore, we can conclude that the refugee crisis has offered an enormous political opportunity for the nationalist transnational and managed to spread Islamophobia over the whole of EU—however; there are huge differences in the actual presence of Muslim minorities in the East and the West.

3.4.2. Islamophobia: the New Anti-Semitism

Therefore, it is important to closely examine the effects of this disproportionate allocation of Muslim minorities throughout the EU that has different historical roots, and triggers divergent policy approaches within the nationalist transnational movement. One of these differences is the way anti-Semitism has been used as a boundary-making tool for the exclusion of the Muslim Other in Western Europe. According to Hafez, Islamophobia has gradually replaced the historically discredited anti-Semitism and while previously both went against the Christian tradition of Europe, the European identity of today has been reframed in terms of a Judeo-Christian tradition.¹³⁶ Similarly to the exploitation of liberal values and LGBT rights against immigrants, Wilders has extensively used anti-Semitism as a boundary making tool against Islam: “Our identity is not Islamic but based on Judaism, Christianity and humanism...By depriving Islam of the means to destroy our identity, we are not violating freedom; we are preserving our identity and guaranteeing freedom.”¹³⁷ Similarly, in her effort to distance the National Front from its historical anti-Semitism, Le Pen blamed Muslim communities for being anti-Semitic when she said that “The growing [Islamic] anti-Semitism

¹³⁵ Robert Fico, quoted in Benjamin Cunningham, ‘We Protect Slovakia’, *Politico*, 2 October 2016, <http://www.politico.eu/article/slovakia-fico-migrants-refugees-asylum-crisis-smer-election/>.

¹³⁶ Hafez, ‘Shifting Borders: Islamophobia’, 484.

¹³⁷ Geert Wilders, ‘Speech in Bomholm, Denmark’, *Geert Wilders Weblog*, 13 June 2015, <https://www.geertwilders.nl/index.php/94-english/1996-muslims-free-yourself-and-leave-islam>.

in our territory is related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”¹³⁸ While Islamophobia has reached the East as well, due to the virtually non-existent Muslim minorities this topic has a much weaker resonance, and such boundary making through Judaism has not fully rooted itself in the Visegrad rhetorics. Therefore, we can treat this dynamic of Islamophobia as exclusive to the West, serving as a further difference within the nationalist transnational movement.

3.4.3. Colonization, Orientalization and Responsibility

On the other hand, the East also has its own specific rhetorics on the management of the refugee crisis that deepens the divisions within the unity of right-wing populists in the EU. Since the countries East of the Iron Curtain have never been colonizers and they themselves have been orientalized and pushed to the margins of Europe—they claim that they bear no moral responsibility in destabilizing the Middle-East and other Muslim-majority countries in the Mediterranean, and thus, they refuse to take responsibility in stabilizing the situation.¹³⁹ As Orban said in his speech on the refugee crisis in front of the European Parliament “I understand that the Left is putting us under ideological pressure, for the West to feel guilty for the crusades and colonialism, but this leftist policy is intellectually disarming Europe against the invasion of the Muslim migration.”¹⁴⁰ Therefore, it is clear that the East does not want to take responsibility for the destabilizing colonial past of the West, especially since they themselves claim to be a modern colony of the economically developed Western EU

¹³⁸ Marine Le Pen, quoted in Adar Primor, ‘The Daughter as De-Demonizer’, *Haaretz*, 7 January 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/the-daughter-as-de-demonizer-1.335743>.

¹³⁹ Eloise Adde and Roman Krakovsky, ‘Central and Eastern Europe and the Refugee Crisis’, *Visegrad Insight*, 23 November 2015, <http://visegradinsight.eu/central-and-eastern-europe-and-the-refugee-crisis/>.

¹⁴⁰ Viktor Orban, Speech at the EPP Congress, 30 March 2017, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/speech-of-viktor-orban-at-the-epp-congress>.

member states.¹⁴¹ This dynamic arising from the distant history of the EU member states adds another edge to the dividing rift within the nationalist transnational, since they all have a form of Islamophobia targeting the asylum seekers of the recent refugee crisis—however, the perceptions of responsibility and the ways to tackle it on a European level are very different.

3.4.4. The Role of Immigration

Furthermore, as it has been already emphasized, the resonance of Islamophobia was primarily magnified through concerns over immigration, in the effort to protect the traditional nativist understanding of the people. However, although the recent upsurge of Islamophobic rhetorics has pushed other excluded social groups to the background, they constitute an important rift within the unity of the nationalist transnational. The saliency of different regional Others in the face of the Roma communities in the East, the post-colonial arrival of Muslim immigrants to Western countries, or also Eastern migration towards the better developed West of Europe have already been presented in connection with globalization and the exclusionary formulation of welfare chauvinism. When the refugee crisis broke out, Orban even went as far as saying that Eastern Europe has a considerable burden of Roma communities but they “don’t demand from anyone, especially not from the West, that they should live together with a large Roma minority.”¹⁴² As the refugee crisis unfolded, these Muslim migrants became the equivalent of the “new Roma” for the Visegrad countries, thus creating a superficial unity in Islamophobia throughout the nationalist transnational.¹⁴³ However, it is important to highlight that Islamophobia only provides for a superficial unity, since the dividing lines are too many to claim coherence within the movement.

¹⁴¹ Pop, ‘We Won’t Be a Colony’.

¹⁴² Benjamin Cunningham, ‘Migrants Are Central Europe’s New Roma’, *POLITICO*, 5 April 2016, <http://www.politico.eu/article/migrants-are-central-europes-new-roma-refugees-viktor-orban-robert-fico/>.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

3.4.5. The Nationalist Transnational Divided in Islamophobia

The discussion on Islamophobia as a uniting factor within the nationalist transnational movement has shown that the recent unfolding of the refugee crisis and the medialized terrorist attacks in Europe have managed to stretch this religious intolerance towards Muslims to cover the whole of the EU. In the wake of this new shared Other, the Self has been accordingly redefined from a European Christian tradition to a Judeo-Christian tradition, using anti-Semitism as a boundary making tool against Europe's Muslim communities. However, these rhetorics resonate much more strongly in the West, arising from the regional saliency of this topic. At the same time, while Islamophobia is spreading throughout Europe, it is important to keep in mind that this is yet another type of boundary making tool against immigrants and the alien social groups within the nation. Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider the differences arising from the different regional Others, be it immigrants or local Roma communities that have not managed to integrate in the society. To conclude, Islamophobia is becoming one of the strongest unifying factors within the nationalist transnational movement—however, all the differences cited in this sub-chapter serve as a proof that there is a long way ahead for them to achieve true unity.

Conclusion

Motivated by the inherent contradiction of a truly united “nationalist transnational” movement, this thesis analyses the transnational networks of right-wing populist parties in the European Union in order to challenge their claims that they belong to a bigger transnational movement. The analysis examines the overlaps and divergences between the two regional clusters of right-wing populist cooperation—the parties of the Visegrad Group and the group of the Koblenz-affiliated political parties—that are embedded in the nationalist transnational movement Europe-wide. The thesis argues that although the emergence of many powerful shared Others in the face of globalization, Euroscepticism, liberalism and Islam have created a unique transnational political opportunity for the nationalist transnational movement—the discrepancies emerging from divergent historical, socio-economic and political backgrounds strongly overweight their perceived unity.

Concerning the many different divisions between the right-wing populist parties operating within the structures of the Visegrad Group and the Koblenz Group, it is important to point out the disproportionately larger proportion of modernization losers in the East; the different social groups that the East and the West aims to exclude with its welfare chauvinism; the competing versions of Euroscepticisms that arise from the different versions of desirable future Europes; the various perceived threats to national sovereignty; the distinct versions of illiberalism arising from the domestic power relations of the political parties under scrutiny; the very place of liberal values in the nativist interpretation of the people; the different regional salience of Islamophobia and competing reactions to the refugee crisis; but also the historical power dynamics between the West and the East—that all together constitute a powerful rift within the unity the nationalist transnational managed to forge around their shared Others.

Furthermore, the thesis argues for three important aspects of the current shape of the nationalist transnational that are worth highlighting. Apart from the recent political opportunities provided by the economic recession of 2008, the refugee crisis and the terrorist attacks—the growing electoral success of the nationalist transnational has been strongly supported by their ability to reinvent themselves along the changing political cleavages, incorporating traditionally leftist economic policies in addition to their nativist exclusionary rhetorics traditionally associated with the radical right. Secondly, the Visegrad case has shown the fascinating dynamics of anti-elitism shifting towards the supranational level, as by coming to power the right-wing populist parties became the national elites themselves. Finally, the exploitation of liberal values for the exclusionary demarcation of the national identity helped de-radicalize right-wing populism in the West, while further destabilizing the unity within the nationalist transnational.

At the same time, while this thesis focuses on the rise of right-wing populism in the European Union, the unity of the nationalist transnational movement struggles with similar divisions on the global level as well. The US President Trump, the Russian President Putin and the Turkish President Erdogan symbolize the global momentum for this political party family,¹⁴⁴ unsettling the liberal democratic international order and presenting a united face of the nationalist transnational worldwide. However, the regional differences in right-wing populism (that upset their unity even within the EU) only become magnified on the global level. Just to provide one example, arising from the strong formulations of Islamophobia of the Western European right-wing populists, their relationship with the Turkish President Erdogan is rather exploited for antagonist mobilization than for transnational legitimization.

¹⁴⁴ ‘How Trump, Putin and Erdogan Unsettle the EU’, *The Economist*, accessed 29 May 2017, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21722651-liberal-values-and-rule-law-meet-capricious-populism-how-trump-putin-and-erdogan-unsettle>.

Therefore, the oxymoron of the “nationalist transnational” seems to hold on the global level of networking as well.

While this global context of the nationalist transnational makes the danger of right-wing populism alarming, the recent mobilization of the liberal left to counter this trend provides a reason to stay optimistic. As it has already been mentioned, the electorate in the West have united with the political opposition of the Koblenz-affiliated parties in order to prevent them from gaining more political power, and the European Parliament has also taken a firmer stance against Orban’s illiberalism, triggering the so called “Article 7”¹⁴⁵ that could potentially withhold the voting rights of Hungary in the EU. On a smaller scale, declarations of solidarity and demonstrations organized against the illiberal moves of the nationalist transnational in the EU signal the beginning of a stronger organizational basis for the liberal left. However, to counter the rise of right-wing populism—which has been skilfully exploiting the distrust the current political establishment—the liberal left would also need to re-invent itself in order to provide a credible alternative political choice for the electorate.

Nonetheless, the goal of this research was not to offer predictions for the future, nor to provide an exhaustive list of all the uniting and dividing factors within the nationalist transnational. The primary aim of the thesis was to challenge the proclaimed unity of the nationalist transnational within the European Union, through examining the divisions along the Iron Curtain. However, in further research, using different case studies within the EU would be insightful in order to better understand the dynamics of right-wing populist cooperation from a fresh perspective, moving away from the historical East-West divide. Furthermore, the analysis of global transnational ties within this political party family could also offer a deeper understanding of right-wing populist networking in a wider context.

¹⁴⁵ Eva S. Balogh, ‘Article 7’, *Hungarian Spectrum*, accessed 29 May 2017, <http://hungarianspectrum.org/tag/article-7/>.

Despite the above outlined limitations, this thesis aims to contribute to the existing literature on right-wing populism that has mainly focused on theoretical and ideological aspects, prevailingly analysing the phenomenon on the domestic political level. Through bringing in the dynamics of transnational movements and building on the mechanisms of transnational political contention borrowed from social movement theory, this thesis observes a novel aspect of right-wing populist mobilization. Furthermore, closely examining the contradictory nature of a “nationalist transnational” movement reveals a lot about the fragile organizational structure behind the recent upsurge of right-wing populism that has been a concern for the current liberal democratic establishment in the European Union, attracting the attention of the public and the media.

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